

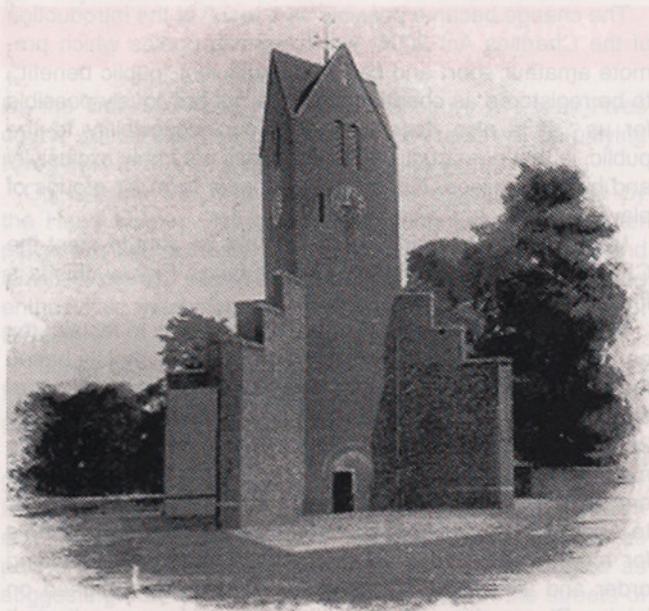
A BRIEF HISTORY OF FIVES AT RADLEY COLLEGE

We continue our series on the history of Fives at schools, with this contribution on the history of Fives at Radley College by Edward Brooke. Ed is a recent appointment to the staff at Radley and has taken over as master in charge of Fives there. He is at an advanced stage of producing a coaching manual on the sport, in conjunction with the RFA.

From the very foundation of St Peter's College, Radley, Fives was one of the key activities on offer to students. In the mid-19th century, sporting activities were increasingly seen as a key part of public school life, and when William Sewell and others founded the School in 1847, cricket, football (probably of a Rugby style) and Fives were all offered from a very early stage. One master writes in a letter in October 1849:

I wish Mr Leigh could have seen a game of football that was played today, about 30 on a side... Cricket is certainly encouraged by us as much as possible... Fives flourishes very much, specially the Winchester Bat Fives, or at least something like it with Bats from Winchester"

The game was initially played against the external walls of the Dormitory. A square bell-tower now known as "Clock Tower" was built in 1847, and diagonal buttresses were added in 1855. This provided four open Fives courts, and the game of Radley Fives had begun. One court known as the 'Pups Court' (ie for prefects) shown on the right in this photo, has a low back wall – woe betide any lower school boy found walking through this area to lessons! Given that the court now possesses bicycle racks for the catering staff and is a thoroughfare for coaches en route to away matches, this rule is now rather unenforceable.



As mentioned, much early play was probably a version of Bat Fives as played at Winchester and other schools, with a flexible bat measuring 21 inches by 4 inches. However, it is said that the game was very difficult to play, rarely resulting in a rally of more than four shots. Hand Fives was played alongside Bat Fives, and gradually the bat version of the sport disappeared. It appears that the bat was just as useful as a method of punishment by prefects: inscribed on the bat shown here from the Radley archives are the names of all the boys who suffered under it (and the number of strikes received).

Judging by this early photo, the hand version of the game appears to have been much the same as it is today. They are playing with a small hard leather-bound ball and wearing



The Radley College Fives bat



Names of boys receiving punishments with the bat



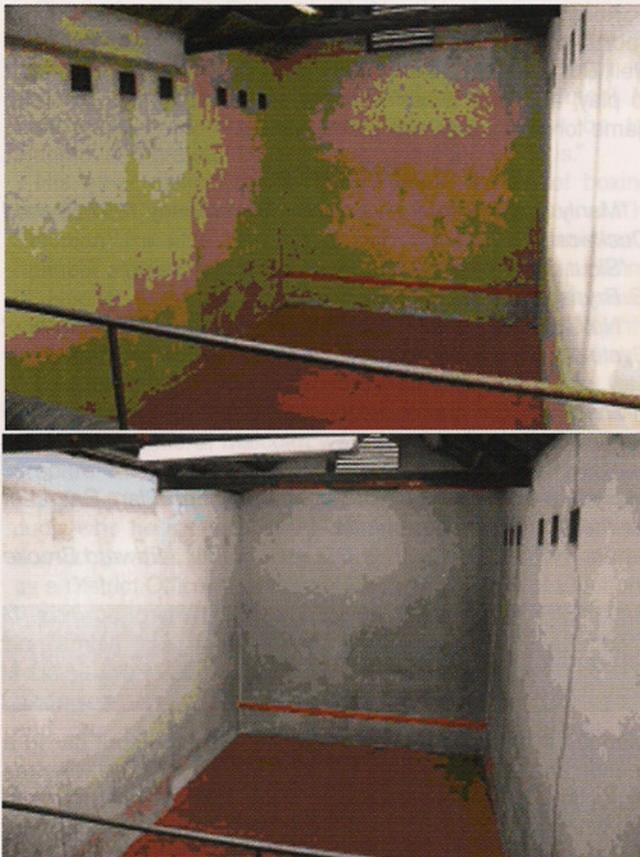
A group of Fives players from the 1850s, three staff including (L) Rev William Wood (later Warden) and one boy (R)

padded gloves to protect from injury. The popularity of beards in the game also prevails – this photo was titled 'The Convicts' by the Reverend Wood's wife!

The first set of covered courts was built in 1876/77. Later, a new Warden, Rev Dr T Field (a Magdalen man, no less!) took the reins of the School from 1897 to 1913, and it is said that his mind was 'buzzing with schemes'. Amongst the provision of many new buildings and modernisations made to the School during this period, he saw fit to build the second set of Fives courts, in the style of those at Winchester. These still stand and are used today.

The courts are very satisfying to play on. They are fast, without being overly so, and the bounce is true. The Winchester buttress is not so large that play becomes 'random' but a well played shot will certainly catch an opponent out. Nowadays, the two courts have slightly different floor surfaces: the East court has a smooth floor, that can become slippery in inclement weather, but the West court has a rougher texture – playable in all conditions, but occasionally giving an odd bounce. The doors are centrally positioned.

Matches against other schools can be tracked back to 1890, when Malvern visited Radley to play Fives for the first time. There had been a Rackets match between the schools in 1887 and 1888, but 1890 was the first year when both Fives



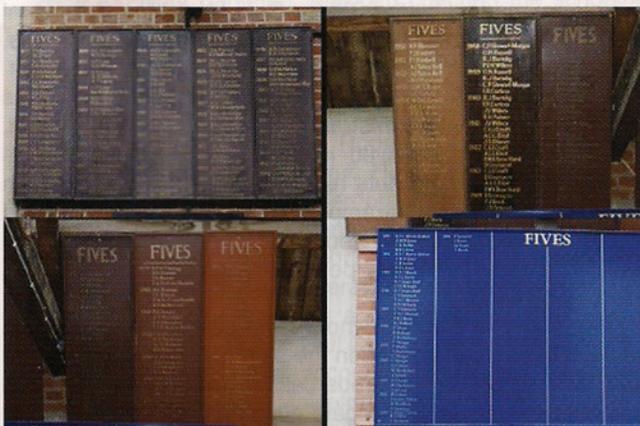
The West court (top) and the East court (bottom) showing the Winchester buttress on the left-hand wall

and Rackets matches were played. The first Fives match versus Bradfield was in 1892: cricket and football matches versus Bradfield had been taking place since 1863. Radley train station opened in 1873, making travel much easier.

It is worth noting that Radley has the longest running Fives board in the country. Since 1875, the names of the top pair are listed, and from 1954 this extends to the top four. The list of names includes many fathers, uncles and grandfathers of current boys.

Unfortunately success in external competitions was limited: the Public Schools Fives Championships began in 1930 and early winners came from Winchester, St Paul's, Dulwich, Tonbridge, Oundle, Eastbourne, Alleyn's and Sutton Valence. After the war, Oundle, Bedford, Denstone and Alleyn's were particularly strong. Sedbergh had its first victory in 1955 and Bradfield in 1977. But yet no joy for Radley. . . .

Our next key character is Dennis Silk, who was appointed Warden of Radley in September 1967. As a *Daily Telegraph* headline of the day put it: 'Double blue is Radley Head'.



The Radley College Fives Board – believed to be the longest in existence

Dennis Silk at Cambridge was a Rugby and Cricket blue, but had also won four half-Blues for Rugby Fives from 1952-1955 as well. Whilst teaching at Marlborough College, he formed a doubles partnership with JF Pretlove and together they won the Cyriax cup four years running from 1956 to 1959. He would play in the staff versus boys match and "the headmaster's booming right hand" was to be feared indeed.

Ironically, soon after he arrived, two of the four courts were converted into space for the Art Department. However, his encouragement for Fives, amongst all sports, led to a real growth in the game at the School. The success since then has been driven by the appointment of several top quality players on staff: Simon Langdale, Richard Morgan, Chris Hirst, Bob Dolby, Ian Davenport, Stephen Jones and the present incumbent Ed Brooke. As is so often the case with these sports, when a motivated and experienced player is on staff, the game thrives. And so this talent on the staff side eventually led to success on the court.

I say eventually, as it has been oft stated, that Radleians have struggled to convert talent on court and success in school matches into results at the National competitions. This is likely due to several reasons: playing predominantly Winchester rather than Rugby Fives; only two courts to play on; the prevalence of skiing during the holidays; and the relatively quick courts at Radley compared to those at St Paul's all play a part. However, success did come and an array of talent came through the Radley ranks between 1980 and 2003. Notable players include:

1979	NA Browne & IAN Williams	(Winners – Colts Doubles)
1989	M Chapman	(Final – Open Singles)
1994	NJ Saltmarsh	(Winner – Colts Singles)
1997	CS Saltmarsh	(Winner – Open Singles)
"	CS Saltmarsh & TAC Maconie	(Winners – Open Doubles)
"	P Mann	(Final – Colts Singles)
1999	P Mann	(Final – West of England Singles)
2001	S Grant-Dalton & R Leman	(Final – West of England Doubles)
"	F Sjostrom	(Final – U14 Singles)
2003	S Grant-Dalton & F Sjostrom	(Winners – Winchester Doubles)

Old Radleians who played for Oxford from 1960 are:

- RA Lane (Brazenose) 1960
- RJ Barmby (Corpus Christi) 1962, 64, 65
- J Reeve (New) 1980, 81, 82 [captain]
- DJ Fleming (Trinity) 1981, 82, 83 [captain]
- NA Browne (Queen's) 1982, 83, 84 [captain]
- E Seäger (St Anne's) 1983
- CEO Hopkins (Lincoln) 1986, 87, 88, 89
- TN Chapman (St Peter's) 1988, 89 90 [captain]
- AGB Power (Christ Church) 1989, 91 [captain]
- JTA Martin-Jenkins (Queen's) 1993, 95 [captain]
- DJC Monck (Wycliffe Hall) 1999, 2000
- WR Hardyment (St Hugh's) 2004, 05, 06 [captain]
- J Heath (Exeter) 2005, 06, 07 [captain]
- TR Windham (Brazenose) 2006, 07

Old Radleians who played for Cambridge are:

- HFB Foster (Peterhouse) 1930, 31 [captain]
- FTA Hole (Trinity Hall) 1960
- JGC Wright (Christ's) 1970, 71
- KM van Hasselt (Selwyn) 1973, 74
- WR Greig (Selwyn) 1976, 78
- GM Spensley (Magdalene) 1982
- IAN Williams (Magdalene) 1983, 84
- AG Olliver (Pembroke) 1989, 90, 91 [captain]
- JC Armitage (Girton) 1990, 92
- CK Scobie (Magdalene) 1995, 96 97 [captain], 98.

Encouragingly, the Old Radleians club, the Radley Manuals, has reformed with the help of Peter de Winton, Tom Maconie and others, and the team played in the 2009 Old Boys cup.

Bob Dolby also set up the Thames Valley Club for all players in the region, although this is currently dormant – any players wishing to try the courts out should get in touch with Ed Brooke, who would be delighted to welcome you.

Currently the sport is having a renaissance after a few years' drought. Matches are played against both Rugby Fives and Winchester Fives schools. In the current academic year, we have played Bradfield, Malvern, Oundle, Tonbridge, Winchester, Merchant Taylors', Derby Moor, St Paul's and Marlborough as well as adult teams from the Jesters and the Radley Manuals. Success is varied – players tend to do very well in the (unfortunately rare) home fixtures, but can struggle when playing away.

One of the advantages Radley has had is taking boys with Eton Fives experience from Ludgrove prep school. Albert Lindsell, Max Florin, Thomas Gibbs and Hector Stirling have all shown great promise, as has Harry Over from Pilgrims' School. Both Lindsell and Stirling reached the final sixteen at Nationals in their U14 year.

At Radley, as at most other Fives schools, we compete for

boys not against the major sports but against the other minor sports: squash, rackets and Real Tennis are all very active as well. But the current trend is definitely up – as more boys start to play, a 'critical mass' is achieved which then propels the game forward. Long may that continue!

References:

'Manly and muscular diversions' - Tony Money 1997 (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd)

'Sicut Columbae - A history of S Peter's College, Radley' - E. Bryans 1925 (Blackwell)

'No Ordinary Place - Radley College and the Public School System' - Christopher Hibbert 1997 (John Murray (Publishers) Ltd)

The Fives Bat and originals of the pictures are held in the Radley College Archives

Many thanks to David Barnes, Bob Dolby and Clare Sargeant for their invaluable assistance.

Edward Brooke

Section 6: Dolobes

Malcolm Mitchell

Shrewsbury School and the Old Salopians, with many others, are mourning the untimely death of Malcolm Mitchell at 71.

One of his many contributions to a more civilised world was to help form the Monday Club and inaugurate the Northern Championships, which he also ran originally. His love of Fives, which he played to a high standard, also rubbed off on his three children, Andrew, Fiona and Ian.

A few years after the Monday Club started, he wrote: 'On Boxing Day 1975, a number of well-fed and well-watered gentlemen at a luncheon party near Shrewsbury were wondering how best to revive their appetite and thirst. One of them facetiously suggested a game of Fives and discovered that three others had heard of the game, although none had played it for more than 15 years and not even then with any regularity or skill. More surprisingly, four pairs of midwived gloves and an ancient ball were unearthed. Off they went to do battle on the Shrewsbury courts, two Salopians versus the rest of the world. There was a return match soon afterwards on a Monday evening and soon the game was being played on every Monday evening the year through.

The club retains a core of four players and leave of absence is rarely requested. A business trip to New York, Lisbon or Delhi must be arranged to ensure a return to Shrewsbury by



Malcolm Mitchell

Monday evening. One member asked leave without giving a reason and announced the following Monday that his wife was expecting. This was acceptable once, not without comment, but when a year later the story was repeated, the Disciplinary Committee (like other times) held an unusually long meeting at the Clubhouse, a local holiday. The member was warned as to his future conduct and I'm glad to say that his game has now recovered.

We find to our surprise and pleasure that we have improved beyond recognition in four years, with our increasing experience more than matching the advancing years so far. Early skirmishes with established players were not crowned with much success and we planned a fixture card with one column for the pre-printed results. We then progressed to a series, almost a tradition, of losing in the fifth game mostly against current Salopians. Now, if we select the opposition carefully enough we are capable of winning the occasional fixture.

We are thankful for having stumbled on the discovery that Eton Fives is such an entertaining and sociable game. We are sure that many others would feel the same if they happened to make the game's acquaintance. After all, many squash players don't start playing at school and does anyone who has played both squash and Fives doubt for a moment which is the superior game?

If we go back to the summer term of 1957 and learn of Malcolm's final school reports, we see a record of outstanding achievement. First, from his form master, Stacy Coleman, 'He has ended a remarkable school career with an exceptionally busy term, marked by the Sidney Gold Medal to set the seal on his classical labours. To a person as many-sided as he is, the difficulty will be to know how to put a quart into a pint pot. He has a great future in front of him and I shall watch his progress with great interest. It is not every Head of School, especially if he is involved in so many and such varied athletic activities, who puts his school work to the fore with such effect, and such examples count. He is a robust and vigorous person who has used his gifts energetically all round and left a very large and personal impression. I wish him every good thing.'

Next, from Rex Cornell, who was his Housemaster for three years, 'He has certainly been the best Head of House I have had, in spite of the numerous calls of school duties and he has not been afraid to delegate authority when necessary to a good set of monitors, for whose unity and efficiency he can certainly claim some credit.'